

Her lullaby

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Summary: Rin didn't know how special Sakura was when he held her for the first time. He knew he would take care of her, he would make sure she grew up with everything she needed and would love her with his life. But he had no idea how precious their daughter was.

Her lullaby

Free! doesn't belong to me. Neither does _High Speed!_

For _sakuraweek_, day 2 (Fantasy AU - somehow) and day 3 (Abilities/Hidden talents).

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><p>Her lullaby**

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Rin didn't know how special Sakura was when he held her for the first time, when her round, dark eyes focused on him, so big they looked like they would devour everything out of innocent curiosity. He knew he would take care of her, he would make sure she grew up with everything she needed and would love her with his life.

But he had no idea how precious his and Haruka's daughter was back then. Neither of them did.

Sakura was never a baby that cried often. Aside from making her needs known, more often than not she was looking around, and then exploring the places she had only been able to see before she could crawl. It was really a miracle, how they managed to avoid serious accidents with their little devil wreaking havoc around the house.

It was no wonder she had such a deep sleep; Rin soon found he liked

equally feeling her warm weight on his chest as she dozed off and watching as Haruka fell asleep as he held Sakura close, treading his fingers on her short auburn hair.

However, at times she cried for apparently no reason; despite many trips to the hospital and many tests, the doctors kept finding nothing wrong with her. It could happen twice the same day or with weeks between two similar episodes, but there was no toy or food that could calm her down; often they attracted curious glances and people who claimed knowing better than her own parents, which only made Sakura more distressed. Eventually Rin and Haruka learnt to take her away from people until she stopped crying.

Rin could live with it. Despite those incidents, Sakura was a happy, healthy little girl, and she seemed to be perfectly fine at home. Haruka suggested that maybe she just disliked crowds (to which Rin told him to stop influencing his daughter), but people themselves didn't seem to bother her. She started babbling words around the time she was supposed to, was precocious at walking and got used to smile brightly, showing her teeth, at Haruka's impassible face until he couldn't keep his face serious and Sakura giggled and touched his lips.

Rin avoided thinking about Sakura's tantrums more than necessary, until shortly before her sixth birthday.

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Russell and Lori had been asking them to pay them a visit for a while when Rin received a letter from his old Australian teammates. Neither he nor Haruka particularly liked the idea of Sakura's first flight consisting on being stuck in a plane for ten hours, especially when she was so little, but they didn't want their daughter to miss anything either.

Sakura loved the plan immediately; at times she would stare at the sky, pointing at planes whenever she spotted one and making sure everyone saw it. The day they left, at the airport, she spent ten minutes looking at the planes, pressing her nose against the glass wall and saying they were very, very big. Once the plane took off and all she could see through the window was the ocean, though, she fell asleep on Rin's lap rather quickly.

It was a peaceful flight until they hit some turbulence. By then Sakura was back on her seat between Rin and Haruka, the belt fastened around her waist. She woke up anyway, looking around in fear as she grabbed the first hand she found, which happened to be Haruka's.

"It's okay," he mumbled sleepily; he had been dozing off, too, and had been disturbed by the plane shaking. "It's only because of the clouds."

"No, it isn't," Rin replied immediately. "It's because the airâ€"â€" Haruka's glare cut him off. "Alright. Clouds it is for now."

Sakura's fingers squeezed Haruka's as the plane shook harder.

"Are we going to fall?"

"Probably not."

Any sensible person would have freaked out with Haruka's noncommittal answer, but Sakura was used to them. She leant back on the seat, bringing Haruka's hand to her cheek as her eyes closed slowly.

And then it happened.

First, Rin saw a flight attendant walking quickly to the back of the plane; from what he could understand, someone was having a worse reaction than Sakura to the turbulence. Then Sakura straightened up, as if she had been prodded with a stick, and tried to look behind her.

"What's wrong, Sakura?"

When she looked at Rin, her dark eyes were bright with tears as she pouted. "She's noisy," she tried to explain. Her face contorted, and she covered his ears with his hands. "Noisy," she repeated, gritting her teeth together.

While there were people talking in the plane, there was no difference between then and two minutes prior, except the topic was the poor teenager having an anxiety attack not far from the little family.

"What is bothering you?" Haruka intruded softly. Sakura shook her head, tears streaming down her cheeks now. "If it'sâ€"

"Tell her to shut up," she sobbed, curling up on her seat and hiding his face between her bony knees. "I don't like it, Dad, please, tell herâ€" Tell herâ€" Shut up, shut up, _shut up_!"

Sakura had been steadily raising her voice; by the time she repeated her plea for the last time she was screaming. The whole plane went silent, curious faces looking at them from the nearest seats. The flight attendant walked towards them just as Haruka unfastened Sakura's belt and hoisted her to sit on his lap. She kept mumbling _shut up shut up shut up_ as she cried, face hidden in Haruka's chest, little fists hitting her father in frustration.

"Don't listen," Haruka whispered, kissing the top of her head. "Just don't listen to her."

By the time Rin tried to apologise to the poor flight assistant, the plane had already stopped shaking. Eventually Sakura's sobs slowly died down, her arms limp at Haruka's sides as she fell asleep again.

Haruka looked at Rin.

"What was that?"

Rin just shook his head, gaze focused on Sakura. "She's better now."

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There were no more incidents in Australia, or during the flight back

to Japan. Sakura enjoyed the trip, liked Russell and Lori almost instantaneously, and felt like home between Rin's former teammates. She even made friends with the son of one of them despite the language barrier, and by the time they had to go back she had learnt some English.

"It was so weird," Rin muttered two days after they came back to Iwatobi, when they had put Sakura to bed. Haruka was switching channels on the television, not really paying attention to any program. "Who did Sakura want to shut up?"

Haruka shrugged, started switching channels faster. "The girl who got scared in the plane?"

"That girl didn't make any noise," Rin recalled.

Haruka put the remote down.

"But she was scared, so Sakura got scared too."

"That doesn't make any sense," Rin huffed. "Sakura isn't a mirror that does whatever other people do, or anything like that."

"What's your hypothesis then?"

Rin frowned at Haruka's blue stare. Truth was, his hypothesis was based more on too many movies and books than on science; he was old enough to acknowledge ghosts didn't exist outside fiction. But then, what was wrong with their daughter? He didn't think she was crazy; sure, she had an interesting imagination for a five year-old, but she applied it to draw creatures with too many eyes or too weird limbs in inappropriate places.

He hated to admit it, but Haruka's hypothesis, ridiculous as it might be, had more basis than his own.

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When Sakura started school, the incidents became more usual than they had ever been. At least once a week the school called them to pick their daughter up; she would throw herself in their arms the moment they walked through the door, begging to go home. She would fall asleep on Rin or Haruka's lap, seemingly alright for the time she awoke again, if more eager than usual to go to the pool.

"Now they aren't making any noise," she explained when she got tired of swimming, as if it made any sense.

"Who?" Rin asked once, grabbing Sakura's hands as she floated on the water to stop her from hitting her head against the poolside. She giggled, enjoying the movement.

"People at school."

At least, that made some sense.

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And then, on a summer night, Rin understood it all at once.

Haruka's phone rang shortly after midnight, waking them both up. Rin had no idea what Haruka was talking about, or who he was talking with, but he worried immediately when his husband blanched, the hand that still rested on the mattress closing into a fist, as if that would help stop the tremors running through his body.

Rin sat up, grabbing Haruka's fist and paying more attention to the conversation as he softly caressed his tense knuckles. Someone was ill, it seemed.

Haruka hang up, let his phone fall on the bed.

"Hey, what's wrong?"

Rin almost flinched when Haruka leant his head on his chest, instinctively wrapping his arms around his husband's back. He was shivering now, like that time he took a cold bath in the middle of winter, or when he had caught that nasty flu the autumn before Sakura came home.

"He's in the hospital," he whispered, so softly Rin almost missed it. "My father."

It broke Rin's heart, the way the words shook as Haruka clung to his old _Northern Stoplight Loosejaw-kun_ t-shirt, the fear implicit in every move. Seeing him like that was ironic, after every time he had claimed to not care about his parents in the slightest, after the resentment he couldn't stop from filtering into his voice.

Rin kissed his forehead, tangling his fingers in his husband's black hair.

"What happened?"

Haruka snuggled closer to him.

"They don't know yet; he was alright at dinner, but then heâ€" He collapsed, according to my mother."

Haruka's grip on Rin was steadily strengthening, as if he would fall if his hold loosened.

"Want to go to Tokyo tomorrow?" Haruka nodded. "Alright then. I'll take care of Sakura. Or would you ratherâ€""

"I don't need you to come," Haruka interrupted, voice feeble. "Or Sakura."

As if she had heard them, their daughter walked into the bedroom then. Haruka was too distressed to notice yet, but Rin saw the tears on her face, saw the way her legs trembled with each step. Saw how she climbed to the bed and, without hesitation, wrapped her thin arms around Haruka's waist.

"You're making noise, Dad," she whispered, sniffing. "It hurts."

Rin let go of Haruka's out of sheer astonishment. The couple looked at Sakura, who had made herself comfortable by leaning her head on

Haruka's stomach; she kept shushing him, as if s_he_ were the adult in charge.

"What?" "What hurts?" Haruka asked.

Sakura drew back, frowned at the question, as if asking _isn't it obvious?_

"The noise," she said again, pointing at her right ear. "It woke me up."

"And the noise was?" "Haru?" Rin raised an eyebrow.

"I like how Dad sounds," Sakura explained. She wiped her tears with the sleeve of her pyjamas, but she pouted again. "But now is noise."

Only Rin saw the single tear sliding down Haruka's face when he hugged his daughter and leant his chin on her hair.

"I'm sorry, Sakura."

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When the topic was brought up again, Haruka had already been in Tokyo, visited his father and soothed his concerns about the man's health.

The three of them were in the living room; Haruka seemed focused on his painting, whereas Sakura was doing her homework on Rin's lap, under her father's attentive gaze. Sometimes he would point something out, and Sakura would stick out her tongue and correct her mistake.

"Sakura." Haruka put the brush down and turned to Rin and her. "The other night?" "What noise was I making?"

Sakura blinked, mouth hanging open as her pencil fell on the table.

"Didn't you hear?" Haruka shook his head and the girl bit her lip. "Like?" "Like, like?" "Rain," she managed. "Like when it rains a lot."

Rin frowned. "Do you hear more noises?"

"Everyone makes noise," Sakura replied, as if it were something obvious. "I like yours and Dad Haru the most," she admitted, smiling brightly. "You sound like music, and I don't have bad dreams at night. But sometimes they change, and when they are bad it hurts."

Her expression darkened when a tense silence took over the room.

"Is it bad?"

Both men snapped out of their astonishment when Sakura pouted. Rin sighed as Haruka smiled.

"No, it isn't."

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Rin was almost glad Haruka's hypothesis had been partially right, all things considered.

From what they understood â€"very little, because Sakura, as any average six year-old, wasn't exactly eloquentâ€", their daughter could somehow sense people's feelings. The fact that she associated it with hearing, out of the five senses, intrigued Rin, but neither he nor Haruka wanted Sakura to think there was something wrong with her ability when they were finally beginning to understand it, so they decided they would only ask a few questions at a time.

Sakura wasn't a mirror, though. She was more like an aerial, perceiving feelings and interpreting themâ€" as sounds. She was surprised to find out Rin and Haruka couldn't hear what she did, and she tried to explain the different 'noises' they made throughout the day.

"Our daughter is amazing," Rin whispered that night as he laid on the bed, fingers intertwined with his husband's. Haruka brought their joined hands to his mouth and kissed Rin's knuckles.

"She's always been."

End
file.